

It has come to my attention that certain parties in the current controversy over Theatre 80 at St. Mark's are seeking to cast some doubt on this cultural institution's significance in the world of tourism. As a career tour guide, former president of the Guides Association of New York City, and former executive secretary of the National Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, I felt I should submit written testimony to the effect that Theatre 80 is a place of immense cultural significance to locals and visitors alike.

History and culture are the two primary selling points of any urban tourist destination. Theatre 80 is rife with both. From the premier of *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* in 1967 to the recent celebration of legendary raconteur Malachy McCourt, Theatre 80 has made its name hosting artistic functions that draw visitors from near and far. But perhaps even more significant from the tourism perspective is the theatre's connection to famous and infamous figures. Two of the most popular topics in all of NYC tourism are gangsters and movie/TV locations. Theatre 80 features both. Whether it is because of the institution's relationship with pre-Chicago Al Capone and pre-Miami Meyer Lansky or the early careers of Frank Sinatra, Robert De Niro, and Billy Crystal (among others), people want to see this delightfully scrappy off-Broadway gem. The success of such companies as New York Gangster Tours and On Location Tours (just to name two of the most famous) speaks to the relevance of this market.

Speaking just from my own professional experience, I cannot count the number of times I have stopped by Theatre 80 while leading our city's guests through the East Village, and how many more times I have recommended the William Barnacle Tavern within the theatre's walls to guests who have asked for an authentic speakeasy experience. If we lose Theatre 80, we lose a crucial piece of New York City history and culture along with it.

Matthew Baker

Licensed NYC Tour Guide
GANYC President 2014-2015
NFTGA Secretary 2018-2019
718-249-5253